

S P E E C H

OF

HON. JAMES L. ORR, OF S. CAROLINA,

ON

THE PRESIDENCY.

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES, JUNE 9, 1852.

Mr. ORR said :

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I rise, sir, to trespass upon the indulgence of the committee in making a few observations upon a topic which is not legitimately before the House for consideration. It is the first occasion since I have been honored with a seat in this Hall that I have made a speech not pertinent to the subject immediately before the committee for its action. A variety of reasons, not necessary now to be recapitulated, have coöperated to induce a departure from the rule thus far uniformly pursued, but I promise the committee that only a brief portion of time shall be consumed in the discussion.

The State of South Carolina, which I have the honor in part to represent here, was not represented in the Convention at Baltimore last week. It would, perhaps, be a very idle consumption of time to enter into a vindication of the course her people have chosen to pursue in this matter. They had a perfect right to determine their action for themselves, and no tribunal has the power to change that determination, or the right to question its exercise.

But, though not represented, we feel great solicitude in the final action of the Convention; and my purpose now is to express my conviction, that the nomination of Pierce and King will meet a cheerful response and cordial support in South Carolina. The selection of these gentlemen as the great standard-bearers of the party holds out bright hopes of promise that the country will return to those wise and patriotic republican doctrines which dictated and controlled the administration of the immortal Jefferson. His sagacity comprehended the difficult machinery of our complex system, defined the relative powers and duties of the State and Federal Governments, and provided thereby for harmony amongst all sections and interests in restricting the latter to the exercise of powers only expressly delegated by the Constitution.



That creed, of which he is the illustrious founder, if faithfully followed, would have shielded the States of this Union from much of the discord and dissension which has embittered every section; shielded us from high protection tariffs, from monopolies, from slavery agitation—from all the ills and perils that good men have so seriously deplored in our history for the last quarter of a century, and made us as happy as we have been prosperous. A departure from that creed has opened up all the bitter waters of strife; but, thank Heaven! the error has been discovered before it has become irremediable; and the election of Franklin Pierce as pilot, will enable him to put the old ship of State on the Republican track; and I venture that assertion, because his career in Congress carries incontestable proof that his political chart and compass point to the track which Jefferson, our great pilot, safely steered the same vessel over in the palmy days of the Republic. He is a Republican of the strictest sect, and his administration will cover over himself and his party with the most brilliant renown and distinction. A brief glance at his history will contrast him favorably with many who have essayed to be leaders, but who are wanting in that sterling worth and unobtrusive modesty so signal in his character.

His father was a soldier in the war of the Revolution, and first periled his life in his country's cause at Bunker Hill. Will Massachusetts forget in November the worthy son of a noble sire, who periled his life in defending her against the attack of British troops? He was born in New Hampshire, a State which has given birth to Webster and Cass, and which was the home of Woodbury—distinguished not more for the sparkling genius of her sons, than her faithful, unflinching adherence and devotion to the Republican faith. Her pure air, rural habits, and incorruptible morals all favor physical, moral, and intellectual development; her sons, living amongst the mountains and valleys, having no large cities to corrupt or debase, preserve their purity of character, and remain inflexible against all attempts to swerve them from principle. The mountain population of every country have been always justly distinguished for their patriotism and loyalty to liberty; and if this country was ever assailed by a foreign foe, and State after State should fall under his domination, the last, hardest, and most desperate of all your struggles, before passing under the foreign yoke, would be in your mountain fastnesses, and by the strong hands and bold hearts of your mountain yeomanry. Sir, the hills and dales of a mountainous land inspire a love of country unselfish and self-sacrificing; and Franklin Pierce has had the good fortune to be born among the granite hills of New Hampshire, and, having lived nearly half a century, has never dishonored his birth-place.

He entered public life at an early age as a member of the Legislature of New Hampshire, and was elected Speaker of the House. In 1833, he was elected to a seat in Congress, and continued to occupy that post until 1837, when he was elected a Senator, where he remained until 1842, when he resigned his seat, returned to his native State, and resumed the practice of the law. His speeches in Congress were not numerous, but always sensible, cogent, and to the point, and not unfrequently they



are marked by elegance of diction, beautiful imagery, and true eloquence. He evinces thought and investigation on all the subjects he discusses; and his speeches and votes show him consistent, governed by fixed principles, which no temporary expedient ever induced him to waive or falsify. His services in the two Houses of Congress have been rendered at a most interesting epoch in the history of this Government. During General Jackson's administration the Bank was prostrated whilst General Pierce was in Congress. He was opposed to this great moneyed monopoly, and no man triumphed over its fall more than General Pierce. A few brief months after, when its explosion took place, the secrets of the prison-house were disclosed, and it was found that the canker of corruption had long been preying upon its vitals; like the charnel-house, with a comely and attractive external, yet within it was filled with dead men's bones. General Jackson in no act of his public life exhibited so much sagacity as in making war upon the Bank; and all who sustained him in the fierce encounter with this great colossal moneyed power, richly merit the gratitude of the country.

General Pierce also bore no humble part in prostrating finally that stupendous system of internal improvements projected by Mr. Adams during his administration, when it was proposed to dig canals over mountains, build roads to the moon, and light-houses to the skies. Some of the Whig papers have commenced already to blazon forth his hostility to internal improvements, with a view of alienating the West from the chosen leader of the party. But they will find it "love's labor lost;" and when the great agricultural States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Michigan, and Missouri, learn that the alternative offered them is an abandonment of a wild system of unjust, local, and unconstitutional improvements by the Federal Government, which they may and ought to carry on by their own State authorities, or submit to the imposition of a high protective tariff to enrich a few manufacturers by taxing enormously every article they may consume, and, at the same time, destroying their foreign market for the sale of their flour, bacon, corn, and beef, by reducing the capacity of the foreigner to purchase from them, he having nothing that will be received in payment but specie,—there can be no two opinions as to what the decision of the West will be, conceding that it is favorably inclined to such works; for how valuable would rivers be cleaned out, so that boats might safely navigate them, when the market for the produce which the boats are to transport is destroyed? Their granaries might groan beneath the harvest of a fertile soil, but the rats and the weevil would be their consumers, instead of hungry men, women, and children in other lands. The common sense of the West has thus far, at least, made them repudiate Whig theories, that high duties make low prices, and that high duties make a home market for the products of the farm, when they see the surplus provision crop of Ohio and Indiana alone would feed every manufacturer and operative in the United States, or the still more absurd one, that high duties is a tax upon the foreign manufacturer, and not upon the domestic consumer of the article taxed.

Capitalists engaged in manufacturing pursuits must seek out a people



who think less, and who are more ignorant of political and domestic economy than the West, before they will succeed in imposing high protective tariffs under the pretense that it will raise revenue, which may be expended in cleaning rivers, improving harbors, or building roads. But I am gratified that attention has been called thus publicly to General Pierce's position on internal improvements, and hope that all the partisan editors of the opposition will echo the note. Truth and reason would sanction his votes and opinions against the policy, even if he was not panoplied as he is in the folds of a written Constitution in his opposition to it. He would have been an unworthy representative of New Hampshire if he had favored internal improvements or a protective tariff. Upon the latter subject the people of no State in the Union, not even excepting South Carolina, have a more decided feeling of hostility to high protective tariffs, whereby you tax one industrial interest of the country to build up another no more worthy, than New Hampshire. How, then, could a trusted son of hers prove so recreant to her long-settled and well-understood sentiments in favor of a revenue tariff merely, to pay the expenses of an *economical* Government—recreant to his own well-matured opinions, as expressed through his speeches and votes, opposing high taxation and profligate expenditures—recreant to the fundamental article of republican faith which teaches uncompromising hostility to all monopoly, as to favor a policy which would increase the taxes of the people of Maine to open therewith canals or rivers in Missouri; or require a Tennessee farmer to pay double the real value of articles for domestic consumption, that a Massachusetts manufacturer may realize twenty per cent. upon his investment, when the farmer in no event can realize more than five per cent. on his labor and capital? If the tariff of 1846 is disturbed at all, it ought to be to reduce, not increase, existing duties.

But other questions have arisen since his Congressional career opened, of the most delicate texture and gravest importance, which he has met as a patriot and a statesman. His voice was among the first heard on the floor of Congress, in opposition to the fanatical schemes of the Abolitionists, when that question—so full of danger and dissension—was introduced here. He proved himself eminently conservative upon that issue, and proclaimed boldly for maintaining the constitutional rights of the South; his action was conformable to the creed you adopted last week at Baltimore, long before that creed was reduced to form and shape on paper. Your resolution there is, “that Congress has no power under ‘the Constitution to interfere with or control the domestic institutions of ‘the several States, and that such States are the sole and proper judges ‘of everything appertaining to their own affairs, not prohibited by the ‘Constitution; and that all efforts of the Abolitionists, or others, made to ‘induce Congress to interfere with questions of slavery, or to take incipient steps in relation thereto, are calculated to lead to the most alarming ‘and dangerous consequences, and that all such efforts have an inevitable ‘tendency to diminish the happiness of the people, and endanger the ‘stability and permanency of the Union, and ought not to be countenanced by any friend of our political institutions.”



If there should be one so cruel and ungenerous as to question his fidelity to the constitutional rights of my section—and I do not ask more than that from any man—let him recur to his speech in reply to Mr. Slade, of Vermont, on the abolition question. 'To the constitutional rights of the South he has been faithful among the faithless; when others have been swept off by the wild waves of fanaticism, and turned their hearts and hands against the just rights of their Southern brethren, he—through all the changes and vicissitudes of fortune—has stood as firm as his native granite hills, resolved that the Constitution alone should be the polar star of his political acts, hopes, and prospects. And although he was saddened by seeing, for a brief season, that cloud of fanaticism which hovered over the entire North, obscure the sun of the republican faith even of New Hampshire, he never quailed in the general gloom, but trusted firmly that returning reason and justice would dispel its murky folds, and that it would again shine forth in all its brightness. Nor was he disappointed; for abolition and its allies there were swept off "like autumn leaves before the wintry blast."

Let me, then, conjure Southern men of the opposition to pause, and consider long and well before they enlist under doubtful colors, to wage a war against one so true, so faithful, so bold, so fearless, as Franklin Pierce has proven himself to be in upholding the Constitution. How many others fell when the tempter came! When State after State deserted, and embraced abolitionism and free-soilism, and madness ruled the hour, he calmly surveyed the impending ruin, sounded the alarm, and rallied his native State on the side of reason and justice. Be not ungrateful to one who stood by you when the issue was far more momentous than a party triumph or defeat. It would be a sin not of the smallest grade. If your nominee has proved, and still proves, his devotion to the Constitution, support him if your principles demand it; but never strike down a true friend to serve a faithless enemy.

General Pierce was a Senator in 1841, and during the memorable extra session of that year. His party was in the minority. The elections in 1840 proved most disastrous to the Democracy—in fact, it was a total rout. He, with his associates, struggled long and ably in opposition to the bank, to the tariff, to the repeal of the sub-treasury—which he had been instrumental before in passing—to the distribution of the sales of the public lands, to the bankrupt law, and all the other high Federal schemes introduced at that long-to-be-remembered session. The Senate then was a body of such transcendent ability that all America witnessed, with intense interest, the "battles of the giants." It was a noble, intellectual spectacle—one which Rome, in her palmy days, might well have been proud of. But his opposition was unavailing. He and his allies were borne down by superior numbers, and all these measures, against which they so long contended, were passed. The terrible blows, however, which the opposition received, finally prostrated them, and not one of the statutes of that memorable epoch now remains upon the statute-book unrepealed. How sad the thought! but how few of his associates still illumine the Senate with their eloquence, learning, and experience? Where is Silas Wright, Felix Grundy, Cal-



houn, Linn, Woodbury? How many great men have fallen in our political Israel in a few brief, fleeting years!

General Pierce resigned his seat before the expiration of his term, in 1842. It is said that Mr. Polk tendered him the appointment of Attorney General of the United States, but he declined, and remained in private life until the opening of the Mexican war, when he was appointed colonel of the first new regiment under the ten-regiment bill, the ninth infantry, and soon after he was promoted to brigadier-general. He served in the war with distinction, and was a favorite with officers and soldiers. I am not familiar with the incidents of his services, but I find that General Scott, in his dispatch detailing the battles of Contreras and Churubusco, speaks of him as the "gallant Brigadier-General Pierce." I do not refer to his military services for the purpose of recommending him on their account, but to show that he is always ready to respond to the calls of his country, whether it may be made in the cabinet or in the tented field, and that thus far he has been found equal to the performance of every duty devolved on him. I allude to his military career to show that the blood of his sturdy old father, who fought for his country through the Revolution, has not thinned or whitened in the veins of his son.

The opposition will in all probability nominate General Scott; and his services in the field would certainly eclipse all his cotemporaries. His life has been devoted to the military; it has been his profession—his occupation in peace as well as in war. He ought to have acquired the highest scientific military attainments, as he no doubt has; but he can never claim greater devotion to the country than the private citizen, who, when danger threatens, or when the honor of his country's flag requires that its enemies shall be met on the field of battle, volunteers his services to fight its battles, and when victory perches upon its standard, retires from the service to the quiet walks of life, relieving his Government from supporting and maintaining him. That, I take it, is a clear proposition. But if General Pierce had high military reputation, it should not strengthen his pretensions or claims to the Presidency. Thank Heaven! we have not yet reached that point in the decline of our Government, when it is *necessary* to elect a *military* man to administer the Executive department of the Government. Most Republics have had that experience when they had traveled far down the road to destruction; and when the time arrives for us to elect military chieftains to discharge the functions of civil officers, "then farewell, a long farewell, to all *our* greatness." The second election will be made by the Army, and the appointee will be a dictator. In this country, civil qualifications are alone required, and however bright a halo of glory may encircle the wreathed brow of the military officer, if he is deficient in a knowledge of civil polity, and is destitute of statesmanship, he is not worthy to rule the people of the United States, and ought not to be trusted with the delicate duties devolved on our Chief Magistrate growing out of our foreign and domestic relations.

When General Pierce was nominated by a convention this spring in his own State for the Presidency, he promptly addressed a letter to one



of the delegates appointed to Baltimore not to present his name for nomination. His wish was complied with. But, after several days' balloting, when even the hopeful began to despair that a nomination could be made, Virginia, without solicitation, cast her vote for him; North Carolina soon joined the Old Dominion, and, in a few more ballotings, he was nominated. The manner of his nomination is a high tribute to his worth and modesty. It is a declaration, signal, yet delicate, that the Presidency is an office too honorable and elevated to be electioneered for—to be obtained by intrigue, by promise of office, by partisan services or by political profligacy. It was a spontaneous and unsolicited reward for political honesty and personal integrity, and will exercise a wholesome influence on the whole country for years to come. It will, it is to be hoped, restore the office of Chief Magistrate to the dignity in which the great Lowndes ensconced it when he declared it to be “an office neither to be sought or declined.”

As to the platform, it is due to candor that I should say, that a few planks have found their way in it which, in my judgment, add nothing to the strength, harmony, or symmetry of the structure. I should have preferred that the master-builders had rejected them; but they are in it, and there is so much more good contained in it than evil, that I am not inclined to interpose insuperable objections to it. A platform could not be constructed to suit the peculiar views of every one, and where the good preponderates, it is good sense not to reject it altogether.

Of the nominee for the Vice-Presidency, William R. King, it is unnecessary that I should pronounce upon him any panegyric. He was the companion and associate in Congress of Calhoun, Clay, Lowndes, and Grundy in 1812, and sustained warmly those great men in making the declaration of war against Great Britain. Since Alabama was admitted into the Union he has been her Senator, save a brief interval of four years, when he was our Minister to France, down to the present time, and is now the President of the Senate, a post he has filled on all occasions, when his party has been in power, for ten or fifteen years, in the absence of the Vice-President. His long public service, and the repeated indorsement of his constituents—his consistency, his purity, his elevated character, all commend him to the suffrages of his fellow-citizens, and afford a sure guarantee that he will grace and honor with befitting dignity and ability the second office in the gift of the people.

I said in the outset of my remarks that I believed the State of South Carolina would cheerfully support the nominees. I do not speak “by authority,” but upon my individual judgment and responsibility. The nomination is far better than the people of South Carolina had hoped could be made; and although General Pierce may not believe in the doctrines of State rights and State remedies to the extent which we go, yet he is a better Republican than we ever expected to see again in nomination for the Presidency. The records of Congress, during the nine years he was a member, prove him to be sound upon the great national issues that have divided so long the Federal and Republican parties, as also his fidelity to the Constitution on the slavery question. We can, then, trust his honesty and statesmanship. There is scattered through every district



and parish in my State some survivor of the Palmetto regiment—a part of the wreck of that noble band. They saw General Pierce at Contreras, at Churubusco, and at Chapultepec, and all of them will bear willing testimony that he was there the brave officer and gallant soldier. Who can doubt, then, that he will carry not only South Carolina, but a majority of all the States—that he will be the next President of the United States, and that the 4th of March, 1853, will be signalized in history as the era of the restoration of Republican principles and Republican measures in this Government?